

### 3. The Birdcage (3Q 2022—In the Crucible With Christ)

**Biblical material:** Exodus 14, 15:22-27, 17:1-7, Proverbs 3, Luke 4:1-13, 1 Pet. 1:6-9.

#### Quotes

- God loved the birds and invented trees. Man loved the birds and invented cages. *Jacques Deval*
- The last temptation is the greatest treason: to do the right deed for the wrong reason. *T.S. Eliot*
- Calvin: Do you believe in the devil? You know, a supreme evil being dedicated to the temptation, corruption, and destruction of man? Hobbes: I'm not sure that man needs the help. *Bill Watterson*
- Most people would like to be delivered from temptation but would like it to keep in touch.. *Robert Orben*
- Virtue is persecuted more by the wicked than it is loved by the good. *Buddha*
- It is doubtful if the oppressed ever fight for freedom. They fight for pride and power—power to oppress others. The oppressed want above all to imitate their oppressors; they want to retaliate. *Eric Hoffer*

#### Questions

How does God “teach us to sing”? What of temptations—their source and results? In what ways are we like the children of Israel in the wilderness? What are we supposed to be learning? How does the great controversy model explain God’s intentions towards us? Should we always blame the Devil (or God!) for our problems?

#### Bible summary

Exodus 14 is the drama of the Israelites facing the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Note how some reacted, telling Moses: “Were there no graves in Egypt that you had to bring us out here in the desert to die? What have you done to us by making us leave Egypt? Didn’t we tell you back in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone so that we can go on being slaves to the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to be Egyptian slaves than to die here in the desert!” (Exodus 14:11, 12 FBV). They grumbled again at Marah because of the bitter water (Exodus 15:22-27). They moaned once more at Rephidim because this time there was no water (Exodus 17:1-7). Proverbs 3 is a poem exalting wisdom. Luke 4:1-13 describes the temptations of Jesus. 1 Pet. 1:6-9 talks about faith enduring trials.

#### Comment

“Notice that the one who carries the bird into the darkness is the master himself. It is easy to understand that Satan causes pain, but would God Himself actively take a part in guiding us into crucibles where we experience confusion or hurt?” (Sabbath pm lesson).

The idea behind this lesson is that negative experiences can bring positive results—and of course no one would argue that this can happen. Yet experience (!) tells us that bad experiences can also cause people to “curse God and die.” Again comes the question as to how much is attributable to God? Placing us in the dark like the master does to the bird is one thing, sending active pain and grief is another.

The lesson references the desert temptations of both the children of Israel and Jesus. The implication in the Red Sea/Marah experience is that God put the Israelites in painful situations. Or was the pain more of their making, dependent on their own attitudes? If the pillar of fire and cloud was with them, why did they need to be worried? Clearly the time in the wilderness was meant to be a learning experience, but it seems that most of the Israelites’ pain was self-inflicted! The desert experience of Jesus clearly demonstrates where the temptations are coming from. It is the Devil

who places Jesus in the various situations, and then initiates the temptation based on wrong reasoning. The great controversy is very clearly demonstrated here.

Consequently we must be very careful not to assign responsibility for all the situations of our lives to God. While he is undoubtedly sovereign, he has chosen to limit himself, and to operate according to certain “rules of engagement” in the progress of the cosmic conflict. Since the controversy is over God and his nature, he has to demonstrate the truth and operate according to his principles. Since freedom is the highest gift to his thinking creatures, God is very careful not to intrude into such questions of choice, and allows the consequences.

The greatest temptation is to doubt God—or at least to doubt the goodness and friendliness of God. 1 Peter 1 makes it clear that we rejoice in the true nature of God as revealed by Jesus, and not in the sufferings or the trials we are to bear. The latter may help *demonstrate* the sincerity of our trust in God, but they are not the *basis*.

### **Ellen White Comments**

“There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man” (1 Cor. 10:13). Every trial is weighed and measured by the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is not beyond man’s ability to endure through the grace given unto him. “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (Ibid.). Will this dear brother, who is so young in the faith, lay hold upon the promise? “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Peter 2:9). This means that, while everything may appear overwhelmingly dark, the Lord will bring forth the tried one with firmer faith and a richer experience.

Our gracious heavenly Father does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. He will accomplish the work of purification by the furnace fire of trial, and will overrule every event to His own name’s glory in the good of the afflicted one. He will communicate grace and strength, and will manifestly interpose His own power to restrain the cruel power of the adversary. But we must be steadfast in the faith, demonstrating to the world a devotion to Jesus and a love for Him that nothing can destroy. {12MR 81}

In Satan’s first temptation upon the point of appetite he had tried to insinuate doubts in regard to God’s love and care for Christ as His Son, by presenting His surroundings and His hunger as an evidence that He was not in favor with God. He was unsuccessful in this. He next tried to take advantage of the faith and perfect trust Christ had shown in His heavenly Father, to urge Him to presumption. ... The sin of presumption lies close beside the virtue of perfect faith and confidence in God... In the first two great temptations Satan had not revealed his true purposes or his character; he claimed to be an exalted messenger from the courts of heaven, but he now throws off his disguise. In a panoramic view he presented before Christ all the kingdoms of the world in the most attractive light, while he claimed to be the prince of the world. This last temptation was the most alluring of the three. Satan knew that Christ’s life must be one of sorrow, hardship, and conflict... He bore Jesus to the top of an exceeding high mountain, and then in a panoramic view presented before Him all the kingdoms of the world that had been so long under his dominion, and offered them to Him in one great gift. He told Christ that He could come into possession of all these kingdoms without suffering or peril... Satan, in his pride and arrogance, had declared himself to be the rightful and permanent ruler of the world, the possessor of all its riches and glory, claiming homage of all who lived in it, as if he had created the world and all things that were therein... This insult to the Creator moved the indignation of the Son of God to rebuke and dismiss him. Satan had flattered himself in his first temptation that he had so well concealed his true character and purposes that Christ did not recognize him as the fallen rebel chief whom He had conquered and expelled from heaven. The words of dismissal from Christ, “Get thee hence, Satan,” evidenced that he was known from the first, and that all his deceptive arts had been unsuccessful upon the Son of God. {Con 48, 52, 53}